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Ministry of Education

NEW LEGISLATION ALLOWS SCHOOL FEES FOR SOME COURSES

VICTORIA – Government introduced legislation today to allow school districts to charge fees for some courses and materials, said Education Minister Shirley Bond.

"This government committed to act on behalf of parents, students, teachers and school boards who expressed concern that programs might be cancelled because of a recent court ruling that limited school fees – and this bill meets that commitment," said Bond. "This legislation will protect core education programs that students require to graduate, while allowing districts the flexibility to charge fees for specialty academies, trades training and music equipment."

Under the new legislation, school districts may charge fees:

- To defray non-instructional costs to operate specialty academies, or costs that are in addition to the costs of providing a regular education program;
- For the purchase or rental of musical instruments for a student's personal use;
- For the purchase or rental of tools, materials or equipment for a student's personal use in trades training or apprenticeship programs.

Bill 20 amends the School Act, which requires school boards to provide an education free of charge to every resident student of school age living in B.C. and enrolled in a school operated by a board. It also prevents boards from charging for educational resource materials necessary to participate in an educational program.

Under Bill 20, boards may offer specialty academies with the approval of the school planning council. Before approving an academy, school planning councils must consult with parents. Boards and school planning councils must also annually approve fees for specialty academies.

"We want students in B.C. to have every opportunity to succeed in school, and that means ensuring they have a wide selection of educational choices," said Bond. "At the same time, free public education is one of the principles on which the School Act is based. These legislative changes uphold that principle and help our students to achieve their best."

School boards will also be required to have a policy in place to enable participation by students for whom the fees may be a financial hardship.

The legislation helps fulfill a throne speech commitment to give boards the tools they need to offer students access to programs that might otherwise have been cancelled as a result of the court ruling.

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School boards continue to be able to charge fees for the purchase of paper, writing tools, student planners, exercise books, computer diskettes and other school supplies and equipment for a student's personal use.

Since 2000-01, the Province has increased funding to B.C. public schools by over $1 billion: $667 million in operating grants and $407 million in one-time grants. During the same period, enrolment has declined by over 50,000 students.

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